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THE ECONOMIC FUTURE OF THE NEGRO

THE FACTOR OF WHITE COMPETITION

ALFRED HOLT STONE

This is too broad a subject to be treated comprehensively within the limits of this paper. Hence I shall address myself only to what I believe to be the most important question in any practical consideration of the negro's economic future,—the factor of white competition.

I shall not exhaust any part of my time in a discussion of census statistics. Such figures, save in a general way, do not speak for themselves. They must be interpreted. As a result we have a variety of conflicting deductions drawn from the same statistical material. A census volume in some respects resembles the Bible. Each is a repository of truth,—and from the one we can fortify almost any economic bias, while from the other we can satisfy any religious opinion we happen to possess. Two courses are open to those interested particularly in this branch of the subject; either to study the mass of data at first hand, and work out one's own conclusions, or accept such findings of others as appeal most strongly to one's judgment or predilections. If I can contribute anything whatever of value to this discussion, I am persuaded it will be by drawing upon those observations and experiences of common life which, to borrow an idea of Lord Erskine, after all are themselves of the essence of truth.

At the outset of our speculations upon the future of the negro we are confronted with our ignorance of his present economic status. We are in doubt about even the elementary fact of his present accumulated wealth.

Mr. Schurz places it at \$800,000,000. Mr. Edward Atkinson, shortly before his death, accepted a *New York World* estimate of \$750,000,000. Mr. Kealing, a colored authority, claims \$1,000,000,000. A committee of this association, under the chairmanship of Prof. Walter F. Willcox, and including Dr. Dubois in its membership, places the figures at "approximately \$300,000,000." And after we have agreed upon such figures what do they tell us of the stability and rate, of even the extent, of economic progress? In the answer to this question are involved two widely accepted fallacies; first, that the negro began life forty years ago with nothing but his freedom; second, that the period of his emancipation has been one of marvelous economic achievement. It is easy to prove progress if permitted to take zero as our starting point and measure of comparison. Frederick Douglass' plea, that the negro race be not judged by the heights to which it had attained, but rather by the depths from which it had come, has met with such a response that the acceptance of all it implies has become a cardinal tenet with most of those who discuss the negro's industrial life. It is both pleasanter and easier to accept this appeal than it is to test its merit. But I take it that we are not willing to flounder about in a maze of speculation, satisfied on the one hand with fulsome eulogies of doubtful achievements, or, upon the other, content to condemn a race to economic servitude without a trial or upon false testimony. If we would know the truth as to where we are, we should at least endeavor to learn how far we have really come. This means a study of the economic status of the negro in 1865, and this I have time only to briefly touch upon. I merely suggest for your consideration certain facts in this connection, tending to

disprove the reiterated assertion of the negro's pauperism at the time of his emancipation. We seem to overlook the fact that there were half a million free negroes (487,970) in this country in 1860, distributed throughout practically all the states of the union. In their ranks were to be found men engaged in nearly every form of industrial enterprise followed by such persons today. Another fact is that the four million (3,953,760) slaves of 1860 occupied in 1865 an apparently impregnable economic position. They furnished a great proportion of the skilled labor of the entire South, and in many parts of it enjoyed an absolute monopoly of this and the field of common labor as well. The evidence as to such conditions is conclusive, but it need not be sought in census reports. It is to be found in the press of the period; in the reported proceedings of negro industrial bodies; in the correspondence of private individuals who went South after 1863; in the reports of numerous freedmen's aid commissions and societies; and to some extent in the official reports of agents of the Freedmen's Bureau. It is to be had also in pamphlets and other writings of negroes themselves. We may not be able to say that in 1865 the race had accumulated a specific number of dollars, though the amount was well into the millions. We cannot do that even in 1905. We can learn enough, however, to realize that we are only beclouding the truth when we speak of the negro's economic progress as an achievement of the past forty years. It seems to me, then, that if we seek to measure such progress by present property holdings, it is incumbent upon us to answer the questions,—How much has the negro accumulated during the last forty years? and, How much had he acquired during the preceding hundred and forty?

It is inconceivable that any people who could increase in numbers from four and a half millions in 1860 to nine millions in 1900 could fail to also increase their property during that period. In discussing as something wonderful this very natural increase we lose sight of factors and considerations which must enter into any estimate of the extent to which such increase means genuine and permanent economic racial progress. How far has it been a mere advance along lines of least resistance? In what degree is it indicated by the success of more or less isolated groups, under favorable local conditions? How has this acquisition of property kept pace with that of others about them, and how far does it represent only the crumbs from the rich man's table? How great a proportion is held by the exceptional few and how much distributed among the masses? How much of the total is traceable to the gifts and bequests of white ancestors? To what extent does this increase mean the holding of their own, or actual, positive progress, in the face of slowly but steadily increasing white competition? In how far is it attributable to the training and steadying influences of the period of slavery? In what proportion do the older and younger elements of the race, respectively, contribute to the total wealth of the whole? These are some of the considerations which must be taken into account, in an estimate of the future based upon something more tangible and stable than the skillful handling of figures or flatteringly expressed sentiments of good will.

The greatest asset in possession of the negro of 1865 was the great, salient fact that at that time, in the section in which he lived, he was practically without the competition of the white man. Today the most portentous figure that looms upon his economic horizon is

that of his white competitor. But even in 1865 he was slowly receding before such competition in the North. To me the most significant utterance at the New York Convention of the National Negro Business League last summer was the note of warning sounded in Mr. Wanamaker's address. He recalled the fact that Philadelphia once had a number of negro business men *in whom the local business world took pride*. But, he said, "many of them lost their business before they passed away. As an old business man I am speaking the fact; they lost their business because the Swiss, the Germans, and others who were American white men did that same business better than they did it. Their color had not the least thing to do with it."¹

In an address in Brooklyn last summer, Mr. Samuel R. Scottron voiced the apprehensions of a thoughtful, courageous man, not dazzled by the outer show of the oft proclaimed "marvelous progress" of his people. At the same time he gave an insight into the economic position of the negro in New York half a century ago. He said: "I have hardly to go beyond the years of my own individual experience hereabouts to find cause for grave doubt. Note in this city, which has grown so rapidly that it seems to have been raised by the touch of a wizard's wand, the place in its industrial history that the negro held forty or fifty or more years ago, the opportunities that were his to build up and to accumulate, and how these opportunities were neglected! This is evidence of a people easily overcome; no, not overcome, but simply retiring without a contest from the places which were not only theirs, but concededly theirs, before the influx of those peoples who represent all that remains of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

¹ New York Age, August 24, 1905, p. 2.

The Italian, Sicilian, Greek, foreign to America's language and institutions, occupy quite every industry that was confessedly the negro's forty years ago. They have the bootblack stands, the news-stands, barber-shops, waiters' situations, restaurants, janitorships, catering business, stevedoring, steamboat work, and other situations once occupied by negroes; and furthermore, occupy the very houses which were once the homes of negroes, only the negro paid rent, while the Italian is now the owner. Look at West Broadway, Lawrence Street, Thompson Street, Sullivan Street, Bleecker Street, West Fourth Street, Thomas, Worth and Leonard Streets, in New York City today, and think of these streets forty, or even thirty years ago. Look at the ground upon which we now stand, and on the section about one mile square known in early days as Weeksville, after one of our race, named James Weeks. Think of those of our people who occupied all these places when building lots could have been bought for \$25 and \$50 and \$100 each, and look upon the present occupants,—Italians. Think of our city's most famous caterers of forty or fifty years ago. They were the Downings, Mars, Watson, Vandyke, Ten Eyck, Day, Green, and others, all colored. Their names were as familiar and as representative in high class work as are Delmonico and Sherry today. Who have succeeded to the business that these colored caterers had in those days? With one exception, Italians. Not one has left a child in an enlarged business of the same line. With all of us the business dies with the fathers. Is this showing a capacity to build?" Again referring to this former negro quarter he says: "I walked for blocks and blocks recently through that district, I found it strewn with little stores, mainly of produce, native and foreign;

every store kept by an Italian and scarcely one in which there was not a negro present as a buyer. One place only was kept by a negro, apparently and that was a pool or billiard room filled with young men who were making the echo sound. The guitar, fiddle, banjo, melodeon, and even piano, were all giving evidence of happiness and contentment amongst our people; but the Italian was doing the business. Certainly these gloomy pictures are not all that the negro has to show in forty years hereabouts, but it does show that he has by no means taken advantage of the position which he once held. If we were at the top at any time in the past in any line of industry, why are we at the bottom of it today? That's the question. In lines concededly belonging to the negro years ago he has been entirely superseded by the Italian. How far in this direction can we go without getting off the earth entirely? These changes the negro cannot lay to color prejudice, surely. Using this as a basis of calculation, what could one say of the 'Future of the American Negro?'¹

Along the same line, an editorial in the leading American negro newspaper declares that a small Italian colony near New York, under the observation of the writer, had "acquired more real estate and developed more business interests of one sort and another in the past four years than have ten times as many Afro-Americans in the same locality in the past forty years."²

If we go to Chicago, we find the same testimony from another thoughtful and competent observer, Mrs. Fannie Barrier Williams. She writes as follows: "It is quite safe to say that in the last fifteen years the colored people have lost about every occupation that

¹ New York Age, July 27, 1905, p. 7.

² New York Age, January 12, 1905, p. 2.

was regarded as peculiarly their own. Among the occupations that seem to be permanently lost are barbering, bootblackening, cooking, hotel and restaurant waiting, janitors in office buildings, elevator service, and calceining." She answers her own question as to the cause of such loss in these significant words: "White men wanted these places and were strong enough to displace the unorganized, thoughtless and easy-going occupants of them. When the hordes of Greeks, Italians, Swedes, and other foreign folks began to pour into Chicago, the demand for the negro's places began. One occupation after another that the colored people thought was theirs forever by a sort of divine right fell into the hands of these foreign invaders. This loss was not so much due to prejudice against color, as to the ability of these foreigners to increase the importance of the places sought and captured. The Swedes have captured the janitor business by organizing and training the men for this work in such a way as to increase the efficiency and reliability of the service. White men have made more of the barber business than did the colored men, and by organization they have driven every negro barber from the business district. The 'shoepolisher' has supplanted the negro bootblack, and does business in finely appointed parlors, with mahogany finish and electric lights. Thus a menial occupation has become a well organized and genteel business with capital and system behind it."¹ As to servant girls in the same city, Mrs. Williams says that white girls prefer to pass by the clerkship, which colored girls cannot get, and enter schools of domestic science to prepare themselves for trained domestic service, and to fill places scorned by colored girls though open to them. "It is

¹ New York Age, June 15, 1905, p. 2.

really alarming," she says, "to look forward to the next decade, when the great changes now going on in the field of domestic science shall have been worked out and developed into a profession. Where will our girls be? Just about in the position of our barbers in the large cities, who have allowed themselves to be forced into the menial service of blacking the shoes and brushing the clothes of their former customers."¹

On the same subject, but in a different part of the country, *The Richmond Negro Criterion* warns the negroes that they are losing their hold upon a, to them, vital occupation. It says: "Our young women must take these positions while they can get them. . . . We are told that they (the foreign immigrants) will turn in the direction of the South. When they come, woe, woe to the negro. His places will be gone, to come no more. The time is fast approaching when domestic employment for females of our race will be as far gone as that of the barber and those who formerly worked in the factories."²

The *New York Age* has commented editorially on the fact that negroes "in the Pullman service are up against the relentless competition which has displaced them to such a disastrous extent in the hotel and restaurant service." It also notes the fact that already they have been supplanted in the dining car service of some of the Northwestern railroads.³ It has been only a few years since an effort was made to supplant the colored employees of the New York Union League Club. It was

¹ New York Age, September 28, 1905, p. 7.

² Reproduced and endorsed in N. Y. Age, Sept. 28, 1905. p. 4.

³ N. Y. Age, June 8, 1905, p. 2. Since this paper was read I have seen a news item to the effect that the N. Y. Central R. R. has introduced white waiters on one of its dining-cars.

an open secret that only traditional and political considerations caused the failure of the movement.

We may go to Kansas and hear the same cry of the disastrous results of white competition. The Topeka bootblacks have been supplanted by Greeks, and *The Plaindealer* thus accounts for the change: "The negro is the best bootblack . . . but he studied too much about base-ball, policy, craps, etc., and not enough about the comfort of his patrons. He was earning enough to make him feel as though the people who patronized him were under obligations to him, and would quit working on a customer to jolly with a bystander."²

From Massachusetts comes the same story, with the addition of other factors inimical to the negro's future welfare. In a discussion of the economic position of the negro in Boston, at the South End House, in April last, Mr. John Daniels said: "There are in Boston today probably 15,000 negroes. The percentage of employment among them is larger than that for the white population as a whole, or for any element of it. This statement, however, is not to be regarded altogether optimistically. In the first place, the figures showing percentage of employment are open to the doubt that most figures of the census are open to. Then even if the figures are correct they go to show how much the negroes have to work, how severe the economic stress upon them is. This applies especially to negro women, among whom the percentage of employment is twice as great as that among the whites." "It is not a thing to rejoice over," continues Mr. Daniels, "but a thing to be regretted, that so many negro women have to work. Turning now to the kinds of work the negroes are engaged in, we find the majority of them engaged in the

² N. Y. Age, May 25, 1905, p. 2.

meaner sorts of labor, unskilled labor for the most part, and commanding only the pay of unskilled labor. We find very few of them in the handicrafts or the trades. The problem, then, is not so much to get more work as to get better work." At the same meeting the Rev. Henry J. Callis, a colored minister, made the statement that today in the city of Boston "not a single negro church building is owned by its congregation."¹

We have the same testimony to the condition of the Boston negro as regards domestic service that is so abundant on the question of his practical exclusion from the trades and handicrafts. The Bulletin of the Inter-Municipal Committee on Household Research is authority for the statement that the Boston Reform League has been unable to secure an equal chance for colored girls in obtaining employment, and cannot secure places for more than half who apply. We are told that "Negroes who specialize in house-work duplicate the experience of a colored butler for whom the League tried for three months to find a place, but without success. He was neat in his person and good looking, and was highly recommended. He stated that he had answered, in all, two hundred advertisements, but he was invariably refused the position simply because he was a colored man. It is not surprising, therefore, that on leaving Boston to return to New York, he said: 'These Boston people beat me. They will have mass-meetings and raise money to help Mr. Washington educate the "niggers" down South, but they will let a decent Northerner starve before they will give him a chance to earn an honest living' ".²

¹ New York Age, May 4, 1905. p. 1.

² Bulletin. N. Y. City, May 1905, p. 15.

Dr. Wm. N. DeBerry, for five years pastor of a colored congregational church in Springfield, Mass., has made an interesting study of the general condition of his people in that city. I cannot go into the details of his report, but he speaks in very plain language of the effects of "prejudice and ostracism," "intense antipathy," and kindred race feeling. He does not try to minimize the faults of the negro, but speaks frankly of "the malady of disunion", "bitter intolerance and strife" in their religious bodies, and of "the worthless element, with no visible means of support". It is to the economic feature of his report that I wish to call your attention. He found on January 1, 1905, a negro population of 1253, with 375 men and 533 women. He enumerates the number of these in each occupation, and asks the question: "Why is it that eighty-six per cent. of the colored labor in this city is confined to the lower strata of industry?" His answer is that the large number who "are fitted for other occupations are debarred by pure race prejudice". "Three hundred and twenty black men out of 375", he continues, "are confined to certain servile types of employment in Springfield, not because they are all unfit for anything higher, but because race prejudice has closed the door of industrial opportunity against these men as a class. But they continue to knock daily at this closed door, and plead only for the chance to fill such places as are open where the service they can render is in demand." He says they only ask "that as a class they may be emancipated from the merciless industrial ostracism which shuts out the capable and worthy negro because God chose to create him black." . . . "That for which they most earnestly plead at the hands of their more favored fellow citizens is merited industrial opportunity." And Dr. DeBerry says that

his study should be "of more than local significance, inasmuch as the situation here in Springfield is fairly typical of the black man's condition throughout the North."¹

Generally, throughout the North, as Dr. DeBerry tells you, the story is the same. With variations of detail we find practically the same situation presented in New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Springfield, and sections of New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, Kansas and the Northwest. The negro has lost ground. In a plea for industrial education and opportunity, Booker T. Washington says: "No one can fully appreciate what I am saying who has not walked the streets of a Northern city day after day seeking employment, only to find every door closed against him on account of his color, except in menial service."² We need hardly seek for further cumulative evidence on a fact now admitted by all save the ignorant; viz., that in the Northern section of our country, with all its wealth, with all its splendid industrial achievements, with all its promise to the child of the white man, the door of economic opportunity is closed before the faces of the masses of the negro race, even though it reluctantly yield to the knock of the chosen few.

There seem to be two contributing causes to this situation; inefficiency, unreliability, and lack of thrift upon the part of the negro, and prejudice upon the part of the white man. I shall not attempt to weigh the one against the other, to see where the greater responsibility lies. Upon the statements of eminent negro authorities their people have themselves to blame certainly in very

¹ Springfield Weekly Republican, Feb. 10, 1905. I am indebted to Dr. DeBerry for a copy of his report.

² Future of the American negro, p. 76.

great measure. I can hardly believe that any considerable body of laboring men, regardless of color or race, anywhere have ever been successfully and permanently deprived of their opportunities by any other body of men, unless the latter proved themselves the more competent to do the work sought by the two.

It would seem then that it is to the South that the negro masses must look for their economic salvation. As I have quoted Booker T. Washington on the Northern situation, I may quote him now on the Southern. Of the latter he says: "Whatever other sins the South may be called upon to bear, when it comes to business, pure and simple, it is in the South that the negro is given a man's chance in the commercial world.¹ Again, he says: "It has been my privilege to study the condition of my people in nearly every part of America; and I say, without hesitation, that, with some exceptional cases, the negro is at his best in the Southern states."²

For some years I have attempted to study the social and economic relations between white and black races wherever they come in contact, but have not amalgamated,—as in this country, some of the West Indies, Africa, and Australia, and I have only to confirm Mr. Washington's opinion. To me it seems that the plainest fact today confronting the negro is that there is but one area of any size in the world wherein his race may obey the command to eat its bread in the sweat of its face, side by side with the white man. That area is composed of the Southern United States. I cannot go into details and sift the evidence for you. You may find it in the observations of travelers, distinguished and

¹ Up from slavery, p. 219-220.

² Future of the American Negro, p. 202.

obscure, in the writings of resident and foreign historians, economists, and sociologists, in the complaints of the black man and his friends, in the enactment of laws and the recorded operations of prejudice. The evidence is voluminous, and it seems to me conclusive, that only in the land wherein for so many years the world has been taught to believe that "the white man despises manual labor," may the black man work by his side. Washington says that "wherever the negro has lost ground industrially in the South, it is not because there is prejudice against him as a skilled labourer on the part of the native Southern white man."² This absence of prejudice applies in the case of the skilled white Southern laborer as well as in the case of the employer of such labor. This is not difficult to account for. Here is where the negro profits by the drawing of the general Southern color line; through this and the obliterating effect of generations of contact upon what would elsewhere seem to be natural repugnance to physical association. The white mason and carpenter work side by side with the negro because they know that that line exists for them just exactly as it does for the lawyer or doctor. The negro recognizes that the white man is not lowered one particle in the estimation of the community because of his occupation. Each knows that the status of the other remains unchanged—the negro is still a negro, the white man still a white man. In a country where lines are drawn between races this has its significance; in one where the line is not racial, but is drawn between occupations, or depends upon wealth or other conditions, it would have no such significance. Mr. Bryce speaks of race feeling and the

²Same. p. 78.

drawing of the color line in South Africa. He relates the incident of a white man accepting employment under a native of means, but only on condition that the latter call him "boss". This may have been incomprehensible to Mr. Bryce, but a Southern man would have known what was going on in the white colonist's mind. It is my explanation over again. As long as he had verbal evidence that the native negro still recognized the racial difference between them, that one was still white and the other still black, he had no objection to the altered outward relation.

But while we may be interested in this, as in any other abstract racial phenomenon, for the negro the cause of the condition is of less importance than is the duration of the condition itself. How long will it be before the Northern attitude impresses itself upon the Southern racial industrial situation, or the Northern situation be reproduced in the South? This is difficult to answer, but we may see two principal causes operating in this direction. One of these is the general spread of trade unions in the South, the other is an increasing demand for better industrial service than the South hitherto has been satisfied with from the negro.

As to the second of these influences a discussion which throws some light upon the Northern situation is also suggestive of the probable course of Southern people, if they should ever awaken to a realization of the difference between competent and incompetent service. Speaking of the disastrous loss of employment by the Boston negro, Mr. Archibald H. Grimke, of that city, states that it is not due entirely to prejudice, though he says that "all things being equal, the average Northern white man prefers to be served by waiters of his own race and color." He says: "The battle for employ-

ment, for bread, has gone against us as a race at these three points in the domestic and hotel service of Boston. At one point our service body has been almost wiped out, while in the others we are yielding ground, and have been doing so for years, before aggressions of white servant bodies." Summing up the various causes behind this loss, he says: "the colored coachman got a black eye when people began to travel abroad and to discover in England, for instance, how much more an English coachman knows about horses and their care than a colored one in Boston. The English coachman not only knows how to sit on his box and hold the ribbons with style, but he is a master of horse lore. He keeps abreast with up-to-date methods and utilities in his world. He is, in fact, a horse doctor of no mean attainments and skill. He has fitted himself to do his work not in one line only but in an all-round way. And as the colored coachman was inferior to him in this respect, he had only to come and see and conquer wherever he and his colored competitor engaged each other in the struggle for employment, for bread."¹

Among Southern men who patronize barber shops there are the fewest number who will go to one conducted by negroes after having once tried "white shops". This is true despite the deep-rooted general Southern prejudice in favor of the negro for all forms of personal service. What is true in the case of the barber is likely to be repeated in other lines of work, more or less associated, when Southern people begin to

¹ In New York Age, October 5, 1905. p. 3.

Apropos of horses and coachmen, it may be remarked that another striking loss suffered by the negro is in the almost total displacing of the colored jockey by the white within the last twenty years.

learn, as the Northern did long ago, that the negro is not the only race on earth engaged in such occupations.

The opposition of the union is as old as the freedom of the negro, but it is difficult to measure the rapidity of its progress. Mr. Washington declares that the absence of industrial prejudice at the South furnishes "the entering wedge for the solution of the race problem." "But too often," he says, "where the white mechanic or factory operative from the North gets a hold the trade union soon follows, and the negro is crowded to the wall."¹ He candidly acknowledges that in no part of the South is the negro "so strong in the matter of skilled labor as he was twenty years ago." We need not be surprised that so farseeing a man watches with what we may well believe is genuine apprehension the slow but steady encroachment of Northern white men and foreigners upon the negro's ancient Southern stronghold. Nor to hear him reiterate, time and again, such expressions as those in an address before the American Academy, in Philadelphia, last February: "In many respects," he said, "the next twenty years are going to be the most serious in the history of the race. Within this period it will be largely decided whether the negro is going to be able to retain the hold which he now has upon the industries of the South, or whether his place will be filled by white people from a distance."²

A few years ago I happened to be in the office of a leading contractor in my town when he was discussing the erection of a local cold storage plant with a representative of a Chicago packing house. The Chicago man broached the question of the kind of labor to be

¹ *Future of the American negro*, p. 79.

² Same language in *Future of the American negro*, p. 75.

used on the building. The contractor told him, as a mere matter of course, that it would be negro labor, as practically his entire force was so constituted. The Chicago party said that if this got back home all the carpenters they had from Chicago to Omaha would strike. The contractor replied that we had no labor unions, that he employed whom he pleased, and that it was negro labor or nothing. Suppose such a situation should arise in a Northern town, if indeed enough negro carpenters could be found to make it possible. The result would be the discharge of the colored carpenters. How long will it be before the same story shall be told in the South?

There is evidence that the tide of industrial ostracism of the skilled negro is turning southward. After the great fire in this city two years ago, I was somewhat curious to see the part which the eighty-odd thousand negroes in its population would take, or be permitted to take, in its rebuilding. During the twelve months following the fire I visited Baltimore a number of times, and on each occasion spent considerable time in research work in the burned district. I was hunting for a negro mason, or carpenter, or plumber,—but if he was there, I failed to discover him. And yet labor had been drafted for this emergency work from every city in the North and East. I found him only as a hod carrier, or employed in wheeling away debris. In Washington last March I watched the erection of a great platform on the east plaza of the Capitol, with a seating capacity of 5000 people. Upon it was to stand, while taking the oath of office, the man who more than any other recent American has been held in the public eye as the exponent of the square deal,—for the negro as well as for the rest of us. Yet in all that work no

negro found employment, save in some menial capacity.

How far this movement shall extend before it is arrested, or whether or not it will ever be arrested at all, are questions upon which I shall not stop to speculate. Perhaps your own conclusions may be aided somewhat by those of the best living authority on American negro statistics, carefully and conservatively stated as they are, for the decade ending with 1900. In stating the loss and gain of the negro in industrial pursuits during this period, Professor Walter F. Willcox thus closes the account: "He has lost ground in the South as a whole in the following skilled occupations: carpenter, barber, tobacco and cigar factory operative, fisherman, engineer or fireman (not locomotive), and probably blacksmith. He has lost ground also in the following industries in which the degree of skill implied seems somewhat uncertain: laundry work, hackman or teamster, steam railroad employee, housekeeper or steward." "The balance seems not favorable," he says. "It suggests that in the competition with white labor to which the negro is being subjected he has not quite held his own."¹

If we may predict with reasonable certainty anything whatever of the future of the negro, it seems safe to lay down the elementary proposition that the home of the masses of the race must remain in the Southern states, and that their destiny must be worked out upon the soil. Their wisest leaders apparently are in accord upon this point. Says Mr. Washington: "More and more each year, I feel that . . . the salvation of my race will largely rest upon its ability and willingness to secure and cultivate properly the soil."²

¹ Census statistics of the negro, *Yale Review*, Nov. 1904, p. 286.

² Annual report, May 30, 1901, p. 8.

The field of the negro's activities thus becomes doubly circumscribed and the fixing of his hold upon that field ceases longer to remain a mere question of expediency and wisdom. It becomes a matter of vital moment and racial concern. It is here that the masses will have to meet the crucial test of the future. Here, in the field that has been the negro's for so many generations, I believe is to be witnessed some day the ultimate economic struggle in America between the negro and the white man. Mr. Washington says that he does not believe that "the masses of colored people are yet fitted to survive and prosper in the great Northern cities to which so many of them are crowding." "The temptations are too great," he says, "and the competition with the foreign population, with which they there come in contact, is too fierce."¹ The tide of immigration is turning slowly Southward, and in my judgment the competition of the cities of the North is to be repeated in Southern fields. Mr. Washington sees this coming, if I read his words aright, for he thus warns his people: "If we neglect to occupy the field that is now before us in the South, it will become there as it is in the North—we will be excluded by those who are strangers to our tongue and customs."²

More than twenty-five years ago Frederick Douglass took the so called Kansas exodus of Southern negroes for the text of an exultantly boastful address on the dependence of the South upon the negro. His words and predictions are of peculiar interest now, as a sort of warning to sociologists to avoid the shoals of prophecy. "Only a few years of non-tillage," he said, "would be needed to give the sunny and fruitful South to the bats

¹ *Charities*, October 7, 1905, p. 19.

² *Same*, p. 17.

and owls of a desolate wilderness. From this condition, shocking for a Southern man to contemplate, it is now seen that nothing less powerful than the naked iron arm of the negro can save her. For him as a Southern laborer, there is no competitor or substitute. The thought of filling his place by any other variety of the human family will be found delusive and utterly impracticable. Neither Chinaman, German, Norwegian, nor Swede can drive him from the sugar and cotton fields of Louisiana and Mississippi. They would certainly perish in the black bottoms of these states if they could be induced, which they cannot, to try the experiment. . . . Hence it is seen that the dependence of the planters, land-owners, and old master-class of the South upon the negro, however galling and humiliating to Southern pride and power, is nearly complete and perfect. . . . He stands today the admitted author of whatever prosperity, beauty, and civilization are now possessed by the South, and the admitted arbiter of her destiny.”¹

About twelve years after this dogmatic proposition was enunciated, I had occasion to investigate the condition of a few Italian families living in my section of Mississippi. This is a region which for years was considered the negro’s impregnable stronghold, the one place, indeed, wherein his freedom from competition and the white man’s dependence upon him were as absolute as Douglass imagined. Before this my attention had been attracted by a reference of John Stuart Mill to the achievements of the Italian metayer. I too wrote an article and indulged in a little prophecy. As the latter happens to have been verified, I am willing to resurrect it. It was that within fifteen or twenty years

¹ *Life and times*, Hartford, 1881, pp. 437 and 438. See also below, p. 324.

we would see the white man's ability to more than successfully compete with the negro in the latter's stroughest field demonstrated through the medium of the peasant farmers of Italy. My prediction was ridiculed by newspapers, North and South, and even many of my friends thought I was indulging in impossible theorizings. For Douglass' idea, not mine, was the popular one. It has been the curse of the South for a hundred years that her people have clung tenaciously and stubbornly to a conviction, never reasonable or well founded, that negro labor was essential to the cultivation of her soil. Douglass simply gave expression in offensive and exaggerated terms to a belief which in its essentials had for years been a tenet of Southern political and economic faith.

No wisdom was necessary to such a forecast as I made. Common sense, an acquaintance with what the Italian agriculturist had accomplished at home under a far less favorable natural environment, and a long and intimate familiarity with the negro farmer,—only these were required. No great credit may be claimed for simply pointing out the probable outcome of a contest between thrift and improvidence, between steady, continuous, intelligent labor, and the mere brute strength of the negro's "naked iron arm", spasmodically and shiftlessly applied. Do not understand me as suggesting that any sudden revolution in Southern agricultural and industrial conditions is about to take place. Thousands, I might say hundreds of thousands, of Southern white men prefer the negro, under any and all circumstances, to any class of white labor. The problem for the negro is a larger one than that; it is whether in the years to come he is to acquire his share of the soil; whether he or the white man is to bring and hold under the subjec-

tion of the plow the millions of now undeveloped acres of the South; whether in the progress of what seems destined to be one of the greatest economic developments America or the world has seen, he is to play the part of an active, forceful, dominant, contributing factor and beneficiary, or is to be a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water, content with felling the trees for others to reap the reward. We are now merely at the insignificant beginning of a movement of the years, the very opening of a struggle between white and black in which there will be no element of sentiment, where sympathy will have no place, where the negro will be called upon to prove his right to live, or accept the consequences of failure,—where “success” will be “equality’s” one and only test. The contest will not be in the slums and alleys of the city. It will be fought out in the open field, under the sun and upon the soil,—where the world may look on.

It is only in the last few years that we have begun to approach such questions as the one before us with a determination to sift the evidence with the sole object of learning the truth. In consequence, as yet we have little comparative data at hand, and few widely separated local studies, upon which to base safe conclusions. We have a great deal to learn along this line, and sweeping generalizations are worth but little when it comes to testing the economic efficiency of a race. But in the light of what we know of the results of competition along industrial lines, we may be justified in hazarding a few speculations as to the outcome of such a contest in the field of agriculture.

Prof. Willcox properly says that the most important occupations for negroes are those of “agricultural laborers, farmers, planters and overseers, and laborers

not specified." These occupations "include two-thirds of all the negro breadwinners." Some light is thrown upon the matter of competition along these lines by Prof. Willcox's statement that the Southern negroes so occupied "increased between 1890 and 1900 by 30.4 per cent, the Southern whites in the same occupations increasing in the same period by 43.5 per cent. As a result, the non-Caucasians constituted in 1890 44.4 per cent of the population in these classes, while in 1900 they constituted 42.0 per cent."¹ While such figures would seem to indicate that already the white agriculturist is gaining on the negro numerically, they furnish no warrant for assuming that the negro's position is thereby necessarily seriously threatened. They tell us nothing of the comparative efficiency of the two classes,—one of the most important tests by which to measure the probable outcome of competition.

The President of the Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College has contributed something toward assisting us in forming an opinion on this matter of efficiency in a study of conditions in several Mississippi counties. "Lowndes county, with three negroes to one white man, having 21,972 blacks and 7121 whites, requires 3.15 acres to make a bale of cotton, while Jones county, with three whites to one negro, having 13,156 whites and 4670 blacks, requires 1.98 acres to make a bale. The farm lands of Jones county are valued, as found in the census reports, at \$2.85 an acre, and the farm lands of Lowndes county are valued at \$9.83 an acre. Yet the poor lands of Jones county, under intelligent cultivation, produced nearly twice as much per acre as the rich lands of Lowndes county when cultivated mostly by negroes. Noxubee county, with more

¹ Census statistics of the negro, *Yale Review*, Nov., 1904, p. 283.

than five blacks to one white, having 26,146 blacks and 4699 whites, requires 3.50 acres to make a bale of cotton, while Union county, with three whites to one black, having 12,380 whites and 4142 blacks, requires only 2.56 acres to make a bale. The farm lands of Noxubee county are valued at \$7.12 and the lands of Union are valued at \$4.81. Hinds county, with three negroes to one white man, having 39,521 blacks and 13,037 whites, requires 2.50 acres to make a bale, while Perry county, with more than two whites to one negro, requires only 1.96 acres to make a bale. The farm lands of Hinds are valued at three times as much as are those of Perry. In the counties of Leflore, Bolivar, and Washington, where they have about eight negroes to one white man, but almost without exception the negroes are under white managers, they make one bale to every acre and a half, while in Lowndes, Noxubee, and Monroe, where not many white managers are employed, they make on an average about one bale to three acres. While this difference is partly caused by a difference in the fertility of the two groups of three counties, yet the principal reason is due to the superior intelligence used in the management of the first group. This is proved by the fact that in every comparison made between a white county and a black one the black was the most fertile, yet the white was nearly twice as productive."¹

The necessity and effect of some form of white supervision of negro farm labor, as alluded to by President Hardy, are now recognized throughout the South, wherever such labor receives from white merchants or planters advances of cash or supplies. Many thousands of negroes who appear in a census enumeration as

¹ Prof. J. C. Hardy in *The South's supremacy in cotton growing*, p. 9, Mfrs. Rec. Pub. Co., Baltimore Md.

"farmers" really work under the constant and immediate supervision of a plantation owner or manager. Thousands of others, similarly enumerated, are under either the general and occasional supervision of a "riding boss" or some other form of crop inspection. A number of years of observation, and a correspondence covering the entire cotton belt, satisfy me that such supervision is steadily becoming more generally recognized as a necessary incident to the business of advancing to, or operating with, negro labor. Mr. Kelsey, in his very valuable monographs thus alludes to this system: "The landlords and the advancers have found it necessary to spend a large part of their time personally, or through agents called 'riders', going about the plantations to see that the crops are cultivated. The negro knows how to raise cotton, but he may forget to plow, chop, or some other such trifle, unless reminded of the necessity."¹ I recently asked a friend who has lately begun to introduce Italians on his plantation, in what particular respect he most preferred them to negro labor. His reply was: "I don't have to spend my life in trying to make them work. After the first year I don't even have to show them what to do."

As in this paper it is the white immigrant, and more particularly the Italian, whom I have in mind as the probable competitor of the Southern negro, I have been to considerable pains in personally investigating the efficiency and general economic condition of the largest group of cotton growing Italians which I have been able to discover. This probably is the most important experiment of its kind in the South,—for the reason that it is not only the largest but also the oldest,—and,

¹ The negro farmer, p. 30.

further, because it has been the subject of a great deal of discussion. Repeatedly it has been pronounced a failure by men and writers who could have had no first-hand information concerning it. I have reference to the colony at Sunny Side, Chicot County, Arkansas,—on the Mississippi river, between Memphis and Vicksburg, and nearly opposite Greenville, Mississippi.

I need not go into the details of the early history of this experiment. It is enough to say that it had its inception in a plan of the late Austin Corbin, of New York, to sell to Italians a large body of cotton land in Arkansas. Through no fault of Mr. Corbin's the Italians sent over as purchasers consisted of families representing a number of heterogeneous occupations, instead of being taken solely from the farming class.

If I were to attempt to make a cotton crop in Mississippi with a lot of negro oyster shuckers gathered along the Maryland and Virginia coasts, failure would be stamped upon the experiment before it was forty-eight hours old. Italian fruit vendors, cobblers, and organ grinders are no more farmers than are negro oyster shuckers. There may have been incidental faults of management also, but they do not concern us. Mr. Corbin died, and his experiment was pronounced a failure. One more prop had been placed behind the wall of the American superstition of the eternal and necessary conjunction of a negro and a mule for the production of a bale of cotton.

Of those families who left, some went in one direction, some in another. A number of them settled about seventy miles from Fort Smith, Ark., and founded what is now the flourishing and growing colony of Tontitown. In 1898 a business arrangement was entered into between the Sunny Side Company and

Messrs. O. B. Crittenden & Co., cotton factors, of Greenville, Miss., and the active management of the property passed into the control of experienced resident cotton planters. These gentlemen were business men, pure and simple, and with them the whole matter was and is solely a business proposition. They knew nothing of the Italian and cared nothing, from any sentimental or altruistic standpoint. They were not engaged in an attempt either to solve the problem of the distribution of our foreign immigration, or to relieve the congestion of New York tenement districts. I doubt if any member of the firm had ever read "How the other half lives." On the other hand, they did know a great deal *about the plantation negro*. But neither were they engaged in any philanthropic experiment in this line. They simply took the two as they found them, without favor or prejudice on either side,—save some misgivings as to the remnant of Mr. Corbin's "Italian experiment."

The number of Italian squads in 1898 was 38, with 200 working hands, cultivating 1200 acres of cotton. Of negro squads there were 203, with 600 working hands, cultivating 2600 acres of cotton. At the end of 1905, after eight years, there are on the property 107 Italian squads, with 500 working hands, and 38 negro families, with 175 working hands,—an increase of 69 squads and 300 hands for the Italians,—a decrease of 165 squads and 425 hands for the negro. The total cotton acreage has increased to 3900, of which the Italians are cultivating 3000 acres and the negroes 900. This bare statement of numerical loss and gain is of itself pregnant with meaning. It becomes doubly significant when we analyze the operations of the period under investigation. Beyond the number of families,

hands, and acreage, the details for 1898 are not available. As the current year's business is not yet closed, I shall eliminate it also. This gives us a six year period for a comparative exhibit of the two classes of labor, working literally side by side, their land indiscriminately allotted, each on the same tenure, each under the same conditions of soil, climate, and management. I shall confine this exhibit to the salient features of the operations. These are the number of families and hands, cotton acreage and production, and value per hand. I shall consider only the cash commodities of cotton and seed, and shall reduce the figures to annual averages.¹

This gives us the following results: Average number of squads: Italians 52, negroes 167; average number of working hands,—Italians 269, negroes 433; average number of acres per working hand,—Italians, 6.2, negroes 5.1; average pounds of lint per hand,—Italians 2584, negroes 1174; average pounds of lint per acre, Italians 403, negroes 233; average cash product value per hand, (cotton and seed),—Italians \$277.36 negroes \$128.47; average cash product value per acre,—Italians \$44.77, negroes \$26.36. Thus the Italian is seen to have produced more lint per hand, by 1410 pounds, or 120.1%, and to have exceeded the negro's yield per acre by 170 pounds, or 72.9%. The difference in money value in favor of the Italian was \$148.89 per hand, or 115.8%, and \$18.41 per acre, or 69.8%.

It is apparent that in the matter of the showing of

¹ For the privilege of securing this and other data concerning the operations of this property, I am greatly indebted to Messrs. O. B. Crittenden & Co., of Greenville, Miss. My thanks are also due Mr. J. B. Ray, bookkeeper, and Mr. Shelby Wright, manager, Sunny Side, Ark., and to my partner, Mr. Julian H. Fort, Dunleith, Miss. Without their generous co-operation this study could not have been made.

production per hand, the Italian had the advantage of the negro by reason of the fact that his average exhibit is for a smaller number of hands. But he worked 6.2 acres per hand as against 5.1 acres for the negro, and produced 170 pounds more lint per acre. It must also be borne in mind that the negro was cultivating a crop with which his race has been familiar for generations, while the Italian had never seen a stalk of cotton before coming to America only a few years ago. Until shown, they did not even know the difference between the plant they were to save and the weeds they were to cut out in the process of cultivation. But notwithstanding the difference between the two in point of efficiency, a difference which is no longer a matter of controversy where the two are practically known, the vital difference is to be found in the story which each has to tell from year to year and season to season. To state it bluntly and coldly, it is for the negro a recital of conditions as old as his freedom: too much time spent out of his crop, and away from his work; too much waiting for the weather to improve; too much putting off to a more convenient season; a too constant and too successful besieging of those in authority for money accommodations and supplies; too little reckoning against the future day of settlement; too much "leaning on the Lord," and too little upon himself, in things not spiritual; too much living for today and not enough for tomorrow. With the Italian it seems to be simply a grim determination to have more at the end of this year than he had at the end of last,—regardless of weather or price; to wrest from every square foot of the soil he rents all that nature can be forced to yield; to get a visible, tangible return for every dime and hour he spends; to live on less than he makes, whether the

latter be much or little; to hire nothing done that he can do himself; to keep the future ever in mind, and to lay by a store against age and a rainy day.

Let a few typical accounts speak for themselves. A negro with three grown working hands in his family cultivates 19 acres and has an account of \$750.58. He makes \$506.80 worth of cotton and seed, and owes a balance of \$243.78. He made only 230 pounds of lint per acre, or 1460 per hand, but even this would have left him in fair shape but for his account for supplies and extra work in his crop. These items alone amounted to \$11.98 per acre, or \$75.96 per hand. On the other side of a "turn row" we have an Italian with three working hands, two grown and one a child, working 20 acres. They owe a balance of \$139.00 for transportation from Italy, and their total account for the year is \$394.54. Of this they owe not one cent for help in their crop, and their supply bill is \$3.17 per acre, or \$21.14 per hand. They make \$804.25 worth of cotton and seed, and have a cash balance of \$409.71. The essential difference, I believe, lies in their accounts. They will not hire work done for them where they can possibly avoid it, but when it does become necessary, they will exert every effort to make enough themselves by outside work at convenient times to offset what they hire.

Take the account of a negro who paid his current debts and had a balance. He had three grown hands, cultivated 25 acres, and made \$730.20 worth of cotton and seed. His account was \$671.26, leaving him a balance of \$58.94 above his account. His supply bill amounted to \$13.12 per acre and \$109.37 per hand. His yield of lint was 253 pounds per acre and 2106 pounds per hand.

Nearby an Italian with four grown hands and two children demonstrated the possibilities of "intensive farming" on alluvial land by working only 20 acres with his extra large force. He produced 685 pounds of lint per acre, while his yield per hand was only 2283 pounds,—but little more than that of the last mentioned negro. His account was \$543.35, and his crop brought \$1596.00, leaving a balance of \$1142.65. In contrast to this we have another group of Italians, with the same force as the one just mentioned, four grown hands and two children, working more than twice as much land. They had 43 acres, and made 437 pounds of lint per acre, and 3135 pounds per hand. This squad has been on the place several years, and is reputed to have accumulated more than \$15,000.00 in cash. It goes without saying that they owed no supply account. Their other account, rent, ginning, etc., amounted to \$426.66. Their crop brought \$2172.10, leaving a net balance of \$1745.44.

The first of these two squads illustrates what may develop into a tendency of considerable sociological importance. This is the withdrawing of their women and children from regular field labor as soon as the step is warranted by an improved economic condition. Here and there this is being done, though in no case until the stage in which their labor is necessary has been passed. It is frequently true that although women and children are included in the statement of working hands, they merely assist at intervals, according to the necessities of the crop. Any forecast here would be gratuitous, but it is not unlikely that after a single decade any large group of Italian agriculturists would make a much better showing in this regard than either the negro farmer or the Southern white mill operative. No large

class of our population can make substantial social progress as long as its women and children are compelled to play the rôle of breadwinners in the field of manual labor. I have seen Italian families disembark in my town from New Orleans fruit luggers, and within ten to fifteen years pass through all the gradations of peddlers, oyster dealers, and restaurant keepers, and finally emerge as prosperous merchants and property holders. In every instance the women did their share of the drudgery as long as it was necessary, but eventually became only the mistresses of their homes. The point of the matter is that there is not one Italian fruit vendor in the town who is not today striving to emulate the successful examples of his fellows. I do not believe the Italian agriculturist is different in this respect from his urban brother.

To again glance at their accounts. Here is an Italian who worked $19\frac{1}{2}$ acres with two grown hands and two children. He has practically the same acreage and force as that of the negro first mentioned above. The negro had three grown hands, and 19 acres. The difference between the results of the year's work for the two was due more, probably, to the fact that the Italian contracted no supply account than to their respective crops. The Italian made 488 pounds of lint per acre, which was more than double the negro's yield. But his 1586 pounds per hand was only 126 pounds more than the negro's 1460. But the negro's account for supplies and extra work amounted to \$75.96 per working hand, while the Italian has no such account at all. The Italian's account, all told, rent, etc., was only \$216.81,—while his crop brought \$1,096.15. He thus had a net balance of \$879.34.

I believe the difference is to be found in their accounts

as well as in the character of their work. Of course, with a greater production there is room for heavier accounts, if the tenant sees fit to gratify his wishes. But I know it to be a fact that even with his present degree of efficiency, the negro could very greatly improve his condition if he would constantly try to keep his account down as the Italian does, instead of continually seeking to gratify his wishes and whims with a blindly fatalistic disregard of the future. In a plantation experience of more than twelve years, during which time I have been a close observer of the economic life of the plantation negro, I have not known one to anticipate the future by investing the earnings of one year in supplies for the next. On the contrary, I have personally known scores of them to fritter away thousands of dollars paid them in cash balances, in ways that would be absolutely beyond discovery. I have seen a man and his wife leave a plantation office in the morning with \$150 in cash, spend the day in town, and return in the evening with no money, and practically nothing to show for it. I have also known them, time and again, to leave money to their credit on the plantation books, and absolutely insist on buying their supplies on credit, and at time prices. We have such accounts on our books today, notwithstanding that we repeatedly attempt to show them the folly of such methods, and try to induce them to use their money in a businesslike way. The idea seems to be that the money from a crop already gathered is theirs, to spend as fancy suggests, while the crop to be made must take care of itself, or be taken care of by the "white folks". This sounds ridiculous, and is ridiculous,—but it is also none the less true. The money thus thrown away by the negro the Italians put to cold-blooded business uses. They will take ad-

vantage of a discount offered on a \$150 purchase of supplies, and I have known instances of their offering to pay land rent a year in advance for a similar consideration.

It is a knowledge of such facts as these, and a familiarity with the "average traits" of the negro agriculturist, which cause me to believe that from the negro's standpoint the problem is much graver and more difficult than one of mere efficiency alone. Prof. H. T. Kealing, himself of the race, thus speaks of the negro's "improvidence and extravagance": "He will drop the most important job to go on an excursion or parade with his lodge. He spends large sums on expensive clothing and luxuries, while going without things necessary to a real home. He will cheerfully eat fat bacon and 'pone' cornbread all the week in order to indulge in unlimited soda-water, melon, and fish at the end. In the cities he is oftener seen dealing with the pawn-broker than the banker. His house, when furnished at all, is better furnished than that of a white man of equal earning power, but it is on the installment plan. He is loath to buy a house, because he has no taste for responsibility nor faith in himself to manage large concerns; but organs, pianos, clocks, sewing-machines, and parlor suites, on time, have no terrors for him."¹

I can bear witness to the accuracy of this picture. We have to post plantations against various kinds of itinerant "agents," or be harassed at the end of each year by the efforts of foreign concerns, generally in the middle-Western States, to force money out of our negroes for every imaginable article peculiar to such commerce. These things range from gaudily illustrated "family

¹The negro problem, p. 176.

Bibles" to "sure cures" for rheumatism, and nostrums guaranteed to straighten the hair and bleach the skin. Western mail order houses also do a heavy C.O.D. business in this territory, largely in pistols, sewing-machines, and medicines. Meanwhile, throughout the year, the Italian peddler drives through the country in a covered wagon, and exchanges with the negro the "soda pop", sausage, fish, et cetera, mentioned by Mr. Kealing, for the few stray dimes that chance to remain on hand from the last trip to town.

We need not multiply accounts for the mere purpose of comparison. The general results possess a meaning sufficiently significant. Of the 110 Italian squads who started to work at the beginning of the current year, 44 were new arrivals. Yet of the total number, 65 squads, or 59% had no supply accounts during 1905. That is to say, practically all who were on the place last year were in a condition of independence this year. Of the 61 negro families who began to make crops this year only 2, or 3.2% of the whole, are independent. This situation may be understood when we know that back of it lies the fact that to the 66 Italian families in 1904 cash balances above accounts were paid in the sum of \$38,764.58, an average of \$587.35 per squad. Of the 110 negro families in 1904 two drew total balances of \$480.50, while the firm had on its books at the end of the year the sum of \$6456.20 in negro balances due. (I have a friend, operating on a much smaller scale, who last year charged off to profit and loss \$4300 due him by the negroes on his place.)

Take another illustration of what these operations have meant for the two races: There are 107 Italian squads at the end of 1905. Of these 104 own 123 head of work stock, and other live stock, such as cattle, sheep

and hogs, to the total value of \$23,400.00. Only three squads own no stock. Of the 38 negro squads 21 own work and live stock to the total value of \$3360.00, and 17 own no stock. This indicates a failure to improve their condition upon the part of the negroes as a whole, and a grossly unequal distribution of property as well. Of 107 Italians but 2.8% have no share in the general wealth; of 38 negroes 44.7% have no such share.

Further testimony to the prosperity of the Italian in his new environment is hardly necessary. I may only add that the best evidence of their satisfied estate is the fact that each year some of them furnish transportation for friends or relatives at home. But wherein lies the advantage to the landowner over the negro tenant system? This question is pertinent, for in its ultimate answer will be found the key to the attitude of the employer of agricultural labor toward the question of foreign immigration to the Southern States. Without touching the broader aspect of the question—the advantage to the general welfare of efficient over inefficient labor—I would answer specifically by suggesting three points of superiority for the Italian: First, I would put a permanent and assured tenantry; Secondly, thorough and careful cultivation of the soil, without the necessity for an almost paternalistic supervision of the labor; Thirdly, following as a natural sequence to the other two,—greater safety and larger freedom from losses in furnishing, and, ultimately, the employing of a smaller operating capital.

As a cotton planter, the greatest fault I find with negro labor is not its improvidence or shiftlessness. Certainly these are a source of annoyance to the planter, but they much more vitally concern the negro himself. They constitute the handicap which, unless removed,

will cause him to lose the race to the foreigner. But the planter's greatest trouble arises out of the negro's unreliability,—the fact that he cannot be depended on to be governed by considerations of self-interest; that he changes his habitation in response to the most trifling and whimsical suggestions, and frequently for no reason at all; that out of any group of plantation families we never know toward the close of one year upon how many we may depend for the next—regardless of what they tell us,—nor how many will carry through a crop after they have contracted to do so.

Here again we may draw on Sunny Side for an instructive comparison: 110 Italian squads began crops in 1905, and 107 carried them through. One left because of sickness, one ran off, and one was made to leave. Sixty-one negro squads began the year, and 38 went through; 17 “turned back” their crops, and six ran off. Of the Italians 97.2% stayed through the year; of the negroes, 62.2%. Whereas with the negro we have the constant difficulty I have mentioned, of not knowing with certainty at the end of one year whose places will have to be filled for another, with the Italians the reverse is true. They come up of their own volition during August and September and arrange their affairs for the following season. And so quickly do they become wedded to a particular allotment of land they are rarely willing to change. When they do, it must be clearly to their interest to make the move. A few have returned to Italy, but a year before their departure they arranged to have their land taken by some relative, and thus retained it in the family. The opportunity which the negro yearly casts to the winds of improvidence the Italian embraces as something too valuable to fritter away. There is nothing new about any of these traits.

This Italian group has been built up largely through additions brought over by those on the ground, from year to year. Possibly they may be above the average of their class, but I have no reason to think so. Certainly these negroes are not below the average of theirs. The statement of the characteristics exhibited by these Italians might be received with incredulity by a man accustomed all his life to negro labor. But this would be due to ignorance on his part. They are as old as the metayers of Lombardy, Piedmont, and Tuscany themselves,—those frugal and industrious peasants who made the valley of the Arno one of the garden spots of the world. I wish I could give you a description of these people at home,—as quoted by John Stuart Mill from Arthur Young, Châteaueux, and Sismondi. I commend the chapter on metayers in Mill's first volume to anyone interested in the subject we are discussing. But perhaps a more modern picture may serve our purpose, especially as it is by a practical cotton planter, who recently went from Mississippi to Italy to study at first hand its peasant population. Mr. Charles Scott, of Rosedale, Mississippi, says: "I visited some of these people in their homes. They received me cordially, and I was most favorably impressed with them. They are a stalwart, industrious, and hardy race. I found them frugal and temperate in most things, and while somewhat peppery and excitable, as might be expected from their climate and antecedents, they are not vindictive, but seem to 'carry anger as the flint does fire.' * * * * * Their diet was simple and inexpensive. A Southern plantation negro would scorn to accept a similar ration. * * * * * These men are already good

farmers, and on the whole have the right material in them for the making of good American citizens."¹

Perhaps the most broadly characteristic feature of negro agriculture is to be found in the almost universally neglected garden. Nowhere else is the contrast presented more strongly by the Italian. Right here is told in humble eloquence the story of thrift, economy, care, the thought of small things,—the whole gamut of homely traits which go to distinguish the ultimately successful tiller of the soil from the man who ultimately fails. Mr. Kelsey says: "In all parts of the South it is the custom for the negroes to save a little garden patch about the house, which, if properly tended, would supply the family with vegetables throughout the year. This is seldom the case." He quotes as follows from a Tuskegee catalogue: "If they have any garden at all, it is apt to be choked with weeds and other noxious growths. With every advantage of soil and climate, and with a steady market if they live near any city or large town, few of the colored farmers get any benefit from this, one of the most profitable of all industries."² To this Tuskegee description I would add this testimony, as I have given it elsewhere:

"Given equal soil and equal climatic conditions for growing cotton, and the odds are with the man who cultivates his crop best and most carefully. The Italian works more constantly than the negro, and, after one or two year's experience, cultivates more intelligently. In comparing the two it is scarcely necessary to go beyond the appearance of their respective premises and fields to gain an insight into the difference between them. The general condition of the plantation premises occupied by

¹ Manufacturers Record, Nov. 9, 1905, p. 423.

² The negro farmer, p. 31.

negroes, under whatever system of cultivation, has been an eyesore in the cotton states for more than a generation. The spectacle of broken-down fences, patchwork outhouses, half-cultivated fields, and garden spots rank with weeds, is too familiar to the traveler through the Southern states to need description here. The destructive propensity of the negro constitutes today a serious problem on many a well ordered plantation. On the property in which the writer is interested the effort to maintain the premises of the negro tenants in keeping with the general appearance of the plantation seems yearly to become a more hopeless undertaking. It seems difficult to escape the conclusion that back of all this lie the characteristics that apparently have always been a curse to the race—whether in Africa, the Southern states, or the West Indies—shiftlessness and improvidence.”

“On the other hand, the appearance of the Italian cotton grower’s immediate surroundings, working on the same tenant system as the negro, is alone sufficient to tell the story of the difference between the ultimate end and purpose of the labor of the two. The contrast is not alone in the things that appeal to the eye ; it is much more emphasized in the respective uses made of the same material and opportunities. From the garden spot which the negro allows to grow up in weeds, the Italian will supply his family from early spring until late fall, and also market enough largely to carry him through the winter. I have seen the ceilings of their houses literally covered with strings of dried butter beans, pepper, okra, and other garden products, while the walls would be hung with corn, sun-cured in the roasting ear stage. In the rear of a well kept house would be erected a woodshed, and in it could be seen

enough fire wood, sawed and ready for use, to run the family through the winter months. These people did not wait till half-frozen feet compelled attention to the question of fuel, and then tear down the fence to supply their wants. Nor would they be found drifting about near the close of each season, in an aimless effort to satisfy an unreasoned desire to 'move' ".¹

Elsewhere I have given the results of "A plantation experiment", as made on the property in which I am interested.² A study of the figures given there will lead to the conclusion that the negro can produce as much as the Italian. And so he can; but production is only half the story. And another consideration must be borne in mind: namely, that the Dunleith experiment was conducted on new land, far above the average in fertility, and, above all, that it was a highly paternalistic enterprise. I know of no other plantation in the South where the negro has been, or is likely to be, surrounded by economic conditions equally as favorable. But the milk in that cocoanut is that the experiment failed, absolutely and lamentably failed, to accomplish its purpose. This was to build up a respectable, industrious, and *reliable* body of tenants,—while this very thing *has been accomplished* on the Sunny Side property, by the simple expedient of the substitution of a different class of labor. Further than this, from the negro's standpoint also it failed. For, despite an artificially stimulated efficiency, there was lacking the final essential of thrift. He made, but he did not save.

I hold no brief for the Italian. As far as he is con-

¹ "The Italian cotton grower; the negro's problem", Alfred Holt Stone. The South Atlantic Quarterly, Jan. 1905, pp. 44 and 45.

² Quarterly Journal of Economics, Feb. 1905, pp. 270 et seq.

cerned my interest is purely one of abstract economics. For the masses of the negro race I have only the kindest feeling. There is not a white tenant on Dunleith Plantation, nor will there be until we are driven to that recourse by the negro himself. I do not believe it will ever come my way to do these people a greater service than right here, if only my voice could reach them, by pointing out, as I see it, the only key to the safety of their future economic position. There is a great deal of unrest in my section over the labor question. Within the last few months I have traveled more than 2500 miles through ten Southern states, and have also corresponded with men in every part of the South. I do not speak idly when I say that Southern people in constantly increasing numbers are more and more coming to the conclusion that they must at last put forth a determined effort to render themselves independent of the negro,—to begin in some degree the final supplanting of the latter by the white man. My study of conditions is not so superficial as to betray me into ignoring the fact that Southern economic development during the past two decades has greatly outstripped the growth of Southern population. But this does not tell the whole story. The resulting "labor scarcity" is more apparent than real. The streets and purlieus of our towns are filled with idlers by day and prowlers by night. If the vagrancy statutes of every Southern state were suddenly enforced the jails would be filled to overflowing. We offer the wages demanded, but it is difficult to find those who are willing to accept steady employment. In a town full of negroes we have had to largely substitute coal as a cooking fuel because we could not get stove wood cut. On a plantation with nearly 300 negroes surrounding them my partner's wife has frequently,

for long periods, had to patronize a city laundry. I sometimes wonder if the story of Jamaica and the West Indies is to be repeated in the South. It is so easy to exist, by various and devious means, that our negroes in alarming numbers are ceasing to care to do much more than live from hand to mouth. Thousands of them are doing it today, and too many other thousands are tending that way. Already here and there, scattered throughout the South, even in many smaller towns, white domestic servants may be seen. There are white barbers and bootblacks, and white men in every other trade and calling. States and railroads and private organizations are discussing the question of foreign immigration with increasing earnestness. I know that a few leading negroes have ridiculed this incipient movement, even as Frederick Douglass ridiculed it as a possibility a quarter of a century ago. The most prominent negro editor in the United States has said that the South is merely putting up a "bluff". But I believe the Southern people are in earnest. As I have said, the negro possibly has it in his power to arrest this movement, at least for many years. He can do it, in a measure at least, by making of himself a reliable, dependable factor in the economic life of the South, but not by any other means within my view. I say he *can* do this. But will he? It would mean a revolution in the present social and industrial life and habits of the masses. To me the outlook for such a course does not seem encouraging. And how long will he require for the process? for meanwhile the world will not stand still.

But in a broader view even this would be but temporary; a mere postponing of the inevitable. This life of ours is, and is likely always to remain, a ceaseless

struggle for supremacy among nations, and races, and individuals. Heretofore he has been largely shielded by conditions, partly economic and partly geographic, but it would be unwise for the negro to cherish the delusion that he alone of all mankind is to remain forever exempt from such a contest. Nothing is more surely written in the book of fate than that he will have to meet it, soon or late. I have quoted Mr. Washington's opinion that he did not believe the masses of his people fitted to face the competition of Northern cities. There the result of such competition has turned mainly upon the considerations of efficiency, reliability, and thrift,—with some account to be taken of Northern economic race prejudice, if I may use the expression. The white people of this country are fundamentally alike as regards their attitude toward the negro. However much this may be denied on each side the line, as to some particular aspect of the question, its essential truth will gradually be made manifest, as economic and political conditions shape themselves toward greater uniformity between the two sections. Even though we may safely eliminate the factor of industrial prejudice from a present consideration of competition in the South, we need not deceive ourselves. Eventually we shall have to face it; as soon probably as the South awakens to a realization of the fact that in her industrial rivalry with the rest of the world she is handicapped by labor of a normally low degree of efficiency,—and begins really to stimulate foreign and domestic immigration. But aside from this, what of the other factors? Have we any grounds for assuming that they would be any less potent South than North, in turning the scales against the negro? I have never indulged in dogmatic assertions about the present of the negro, and I shall certainly not

begin with a dogmatic prediction as to his future. I have merely tried to indicate some of the factors and results of such a contest, as they have already been wrought out before us in a sort of mimic warfare. Is any man, qualified to speak by familiarity with the negro masses, prepared to promise that in a larger field, upon a broader stage, the end of the struggle would not be the same?

It will be a slow process of attrition, when it really comes, this working out of the results of competition. It will not be attended by any sensational features. There will be nothing sudden about it, nor will it mean the extinction of the negro as an economic factor. It seems to me that its effect will be merely to submerge the incompetent mass, and elevate, in that very process, such as can weather the storm. In its last analysis, it will be his own, not the white man's hand, that closes in the negro's face the door of economic hope,—for only he can keep it open. If the story of the fate of the old time business negro of New York and Philadelphia in the years to come shall be related of the negro agriculturist of the South, it will be for the latter but a final reaping of the fruits of Reuben's ancient curse: "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

My conception of the treatment of the question before us does not involve an outlook upon the thirteenth census. On the other hand, I am not projecting it into a future too remote for practical consideration. I have not founded conclusions upon isolated phenomena, nor am I particularly concerned with this or that group of conditions, save as they disclose the results of the working out of what reasonably seem to be persistent factors. The particular demonstration of relative efficiency be-

tween Italians and negroes which has been used here, would lose nothing of its significance if through some adventitious circumstance the Sunny Side colony were wiped out of existence tomorrow; or if for reasons sufficient unto themselves the operators of that property were immediately to displace every Italian on it, and return to negro labor. I have merely endeavored to deal with forces already widely and actively at work, and with human traits the operation of which has already been unfolded to our view. If these constitute two groups of fixed elements in the problem then the future is no more uncertain than are the operations of the natural laws by which we forecast the outcome of any other struggle between weakness and strength. True, "the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;" but in this case the initial distance between the contestants would seem too great to be overcome by time or chance.

Very likely it will be urged that I have given the point of view of the employer of negro labor, and have too greatly emphasized the force of the weaker side of the negro masses. The other side has been presented many times, in the attempt to make out a case against the white man which would lift the onus for existing conditions from the shoulders of the negro. Mr. T. Thomas Fortune quotes from Dr. DuBois the statement that "in well-nigh the whole rural South the black farmers are peons, bound by law and custom to an economic slavery, from which the only escape is death or the penitentiary." He adds his own to this effect: "It is a dark and gloomy picture, the substitution of industrial for chattel slavery, with none of the legal and selfish restraints upon the employer which surrounded and actuated the master. And this is true of the entire

mass of the Afro-American laborers of the Southern states."¹ I submit the picture just as it is drawn. This is not the place to discuss the question of its fidelity to truth. My only comment is that I am not able to fathom the buoyancy of spirit which can believe in the accuracy of this presentation of the negro's present economic condition and at the same time profess a hope for his future. It is idle here to confuse the practical question of actual conditions with the ethical question of cause. For our purpose we need not stop to multiply words in an effort to determine where rests the burthen of responsibility. Between the white man and the black it is likely always to remain a disputed question. This is human nature. But a man who has ceased to breathe is equally dead, whether he came to his death by assassination or suicide. If the end is to be the same, the negro masses will not be particularly interested in the academic question of causes and means. If the white man is responsible for the negro's condition; if the latter cannot remove the obstacles from his own path, then his economic future no longer remains within the field of speculation, and the efforts toward his industrial training become a mockery to him and a fraud upon those who support them. But I take the view which at least holds something of hope for the negro, in that it does not entirely remove his present or future from the range of his own individual efforts. As I have expressed it elsewhere: "When the friend of the negro masses would know the whole truth behind the forces which today most militate against the material progress of the race, he must go deep below the surface of troubles which the white man can remove or rectify."²

¹ The negro problem, pp. 228 and 229.

² Quarterly Journal of Economics, Feb. 1905, p. 286.

In the larger sense there is another aspect of the negro's life that must be considered in attempting to estimate his future. The two gravest obstacles to be overcome by the race are improvidence and immorality,—each in its broadest significance. Of the first I have already said quite enough. Of the second I shall let Mr. Washington and Dr. DuBois speak for me. The former says: "No one who wants to be honest and at the same time benefit the race will deny that here is where the strengthening is to be done."¹ Dr. DuBois says: "The evil is still deep seated, and only a general raising of the standard of living will finally cure it." In this connection he says of the negroes of a Georgia county: "Perhaps ten per cent compose the well-to-do and the best of the laborers, while at least nine per cent are thoroughly lewd and vicious. The rest, over eighty per cent, are poor and ignorant, fairly honest and well meaning, plodding, and to a degree shiftless, with some but not great sexual looseness."² I might alter some of these proportions, but, applied to the country as a whole, they tell the story well enough as they stand.

Here then it seems to me, is the first great problem of this people,—the problem of the moral elevation of the masses, whose status will at last determine that of the race as a whole. No man is further than I from attempting to discount the value to a race or nation of its exceptional few,—the wealth it has in the possession of a "talented tenth." But, after all is said and done, the race, it seems to me, must stand or fall by the character of the masses of its people. It cannot be

¹ The future of the American negro, pp. 168-170.

² Souls of black folk, pp. 141-143.

saved by the poetry of Dunbar, by the novels of Chestnut, by the music of Coleridge-Taylor, by the surgical skill of Williams, or by the culture and intellect of the distinguished man who has just addressed you.

In his work on "Social evolution" Mr. Benjamin Kidd says that the future demands that we realize more clearly just what constitutes superiority and inferiority of race. He says that science gives us no warrant for claiming superiority for a certain race on the ground alone of color, descent, or even high intellectual capacity. In his opinion the only test lies in the measure of the possession of "qualities contributing to social efficiency," and high among these he places "strength and energy of character, humanity, probity and integrity, and simple-minded devotion to conceptions of duty in such circumstances as may arise." Mr. Kidd quotes Mr. Lecky's opinion as to the causes of the prosperity of nations. The latter's words are more impressive than his own, for they apply to races as well as nations, to black as well as white. And here is his judgment on real "prosperity",—which the friends and leaders of the American negro may not unprofitably take to heart: "Its foundation is laid in pure domestic life, in commercial integrity, in a high standard of moral worth and of public spirit, in simple habits, in courage, uprightness, and a certain soundness and moderation of judgment which springs quite as much from character as from intellect." And his conclusion seems to me to be especially applicable to our discussion: "If you would form a wise judgment of the future of a nation, observe carefully whether these qualities are increasing or decaying."¹

¹ Social evolution, Kidd, pp. 348-350, quoting from Mr. Lecky's *The political value of history*.

The negro has often demanded another standard than that of race as a measure of his capacity and value as a people. Here is one, severe possibly, but fair: The extent to which the race as a whole shall prove its ability to lay the foundation of "a pure domestic life", and erect thereon a superstructure of character and moral worth. If it shall establish the capacity of its masses to meet this test, then it will have proved its title to a place among the superior races of the earth,—and this regardless of your opinion or of mine, or of that of our fathers before us. But, though it become ten thousand times richer than it is today, and overflow the land in numbers, and fill all offices of profit, if it fail in this supreme criterion it will still be an inferior people. The foundation of the greatness of England and Germany and America does not consist of material things alone, nor of the brilliant achievements of their "talented tenths". It is to be discovered in the character of the home life of their great average classes,—the masses of their people. It is the latter which makes possible, and assures, the former, and there is no shorter, easier road for the negro than for the white man. Then the current measure of the real progress of the race is to be found in the extent to which the characteristics of one or the other of its two extremes—its highest or its lowest class—are most impressed upon the mass. It is not alone in the possession of houses that the foundations of prosperity, as Mr. Lecky defines it, are laid; nor in their possession alone that racial advance is indicated. It is, rather, in the extent to which these houses possess for their owners the true significance of homes. This test is sound, but difficult of certain application. It is easier to enumerate the houses of a people than it is to count their homes.